



1344  
MAR 13 1957

# SO SHALL I SING

Wretched my body,  
But He saves my soul,  
So shall I sing  
Out of my heart  
His praises  
On this birthday of my king!

Tr. by Lois J. Erickson

THE ROMANCE OF CHRISTIAN  
LEPROSY MISSIONS IN JAPAN



# In Ancient Legend



Empress Kwomyo

Close by the deer park at Nara stand the ruins of a hospice built by the Empress Kwomyo Kwogo for those sick with leprosy. According to the legend, this charitable consort of Emperor Shomu reigning in 1200 A D was instructed in a dream to care for 1000 sick, in reward for which she was to receive the power to heal. With mercy and compassion the Empress set about her mission.

Long and arduous was her term of service, but the end was in sight at last.

The 1000th person to come to her for help, so the story goes, was a maimed and repulsive victim of leprosy. In vain did her attendants plead with her to refrain from touching the wretched creature. Obedient to her dream the Empress washed his sores and dressed his wounds. Looking at last into the sick man's face, she found it illumined by a divine light. Before her eyes her patient was transformed into the Buddhist god Lototake who thanked her and departed, blessing her and her merciful work.

## WHEN THE MISSIONARIES CAME

Powerful as was this impetus toward helping those with leprosy, Empress Kwomyo's example did not alter to any considerable degree the public attitude or action in the ensuing centuries. Leprosy was looked upon as a disease cursed by heaven—its unfortunate victims unworthy of human love and charity. Cast out from society, they were to be seen begging out a miserable existence in the streets of Japan's great cities, sleeping under verandahs and broken tiles of deserted temples by night.

Believed incurable and hereditary, the taint of leprosy was held cause for divorce to the 10th generation. So rigorous was the ostracism of the diseased that the more sensitive often chose to take their lives rather than live out their days as wretched, pitiable outcasts.

Though Japan was believed to be among civilized nations "the most leprous country in the world," there was not in all Japan, when the first missionaries arrived in the last quarter of the 19th century, a single institution where those with leprosy could find a haven of healing and mercy.

Yet within 50 years Christian initiative had brought about the establishment of six privately maintained Christian leprosy homes. The example of this ministry of mercy encouraged the Japanese government first to recognize its national leprosy problem and then to undertake an extensive program of leprosy control and public education. By the outbreak of the war, it had established ten national or pre-

## SO SHALL I SING

fectural leprosaria. It had reached out to fully a third of its known leprosy population and was well on its way to extending its program to care for all of its estimated 30,000 victims.

### YESTERDAY AND TODAY

In few other countries has the struggle against leprosy presented such a colorful history of selfless dedication, purposeful effort and enlightened service. The three-score years from the coming of the missionaries to the outbreak of the past tragic war encompass the lives of such men and women as Dr. Albert Oltmans, Mary Cornwall-Legh, Dr. and Mrs. S. M. Erickson, and of Japanese Christians whom they inspired: doctors, nurses, hospital workers, government officials. It is the record of growing government awareness and responsibility for the care of leprosy victims; of rising public interest in the leprosy control movement.

In the course of these telling years, strong bonds of friendship and cooperation have grown up between American Christians and those in Japan concerned with the Christ-inspired ministry to those sick with leprosy. While interrupted temporarily by the war years, the privileges and obligations of Christian fellowship are once more ours. Once again we can take advantage of the opportunities offered us to extend a helping hand across the Pacific to those in great physical need and spiritual isolation.

# Leprosy in Japan

A recent estimate sets the number of known leprosy victims in Japan at the present time somewhat lower than the accepted prewar figure, at 25,000. Of these between nine and ten thousand are under medical care in the ten government and three private leprosy institutions.



Japanese leprosy patient.

## LEPROSARIA

Of the seven private leprosaria in existence before the war, one was Buddhist, two were Roman Catholic, and four Protestant. For many Americans of long memory, the names of *Ihaien*, Tokyo; *St. Barnabas*, Kusatsu; *Kaishun In*, Kumamoto; and *St. Barnabas*, Fukuoka, are spiritually romantic names. Today of those Protestant institutions only a portion of the Kumamoto work—involving the care of some 26 children—survives. Nor is there much likelihood that the former private Christian leprosy homes will be reestablished. Japan's present economic situation is not conducive to their reestablishment and the situation is not likely to improve much in the near future.

## THE WAR YEARS

In 1940, *St. Barnabas* hospital in Kusatsu was absorbed into the nearby government hospital, *Kuriu Rakusei En*. Patients were transferred to the new hospital, along with a number of the *St. Barnabas* buildings and their beloved chapel. Though little remains in a material way of the cluster of homes that made



## SO SHALL I SING

up the St. Barnabas Mission, the vigorous Christian congregation, St. Ishu Kyokoi, carries on its spiritual heritage at Rakusei En.

Kaishun In, founded by Miss Hannah Riddell and carried on for many years by her niece-successor, Miss Ada H. Wright, at Kumamoto was closed in the spring of 1941 and its patients transferred to the government hospital, Keifu En.

The mother house of leprosy institutions, Ihaien, Tokyo, founded in 1894, was closed as a wartime exigency in 1942, and its patients transferred to the Zensei Byoin government institution.

## CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS

There are Christian congregations in each of the ten government hospitals for leprosy patients in Japan, with memberships ranging from 60 at Shensei En, to 223 at Zensei En and 263 at Rakusei En, Kusatsu. Altogether, in the ten government institutions, there are 1339 adult and child members of the Christian churches.

Though none has, at the present time, a full time minister, and only five have church buildings, and though they were isolated from contact with the Christian world throughout the war years, these little bands of sick and suffering Christians have kept the Faith.

The relation between government authorities connected with the leprosy hospitals and Christian workers among the patients has been traditionally friendly. Early Christian leprosy workers had intimate association with government officials and even helped shape the nature of the state-supported hospitals. Superintendents have put no obstacles in the way of efforts to organize churches and have often welcomed Christian activity. The transfer of patients from former Christian homes to the

larger government hospitals was carried out with sympathy and understanding.

Since the war the attitude of the hospital authorities appears to be even more friendly to Christian activities and workers.

## THE KOZENSHA

In 1894 a group of missionaries — mainly Presbyterian and Reformed Church—together with a number of Japanese Christians banded together to found the Christian Committee for Leprosy Work, commonly known as the Kozensha. Under its leadership Japan's first leprosy asylum, the Ihaïen (Garden of Comfort) Home, was founded. Later it extended its ministry to patients in all government and private hospitals for the care of leprosy victims. It arranged for ministers and missionaries to act as chaplains and to take responsibility in the hospital congregations. It organized Christian giving to inmates at Christmas time and distributed Christian literature. For many years the Kozensha was the agency through which American churches and the American Mission to Lepers cooperated with Christians in Japan concerned with the leprosy ministry.

The war and defeat affected the morale of millions of Japanese, and members of the Kozensha could not escape that widespread experience. When the missionaries returned in 1946, they found many of the members of the Kozensha poor, undernourished, ill-clad, badly housed, having lost homes and possessions by bombing and consequent fires. The work of the Kozensha had suffered too. Communication with distant hospitals was wellnigh impossible. For lack of funds it could not distribute Christian literature on the scale it did before the war. It could not organize Christian giving for leprosy patients at Christmastime as in former years.

## Chapters from the Past

Among the noteworthy pioneers in Japan's anti-leprosy movement are two Englishwomen, Mary Cornwall-Legh and Miss Hannah Riddell; and the Americans, Dr. and Mrs. S. M. Erickson, and Dr. Albert Oltmans. The inspiration of their lives and their achievements time will not erase from the hearts of men or the history of a worldwide Christian ministry.

### ST. BARNABAS—KUSATSU



Mary Cornwall-Legh

The gentle Englishwoman, Mary Cornwall-Legh, came to Kusatsu to live in 1915 — first simply with the idea of mothering the isolated village of leprosy sufferers high in the mountains northeast of Tokyo. She remained to devote her life and resources in provid-

ing, for the poorest and most helpless in the village, Christian homes and a life of exceptional peace, beauty, and healing for body and spirit.

Kusatsu had long been famous as a center of healing. The hot mineral stream rushing through the valley had attracted thousands of men and women in search of health in its medicinal waters — including many suffering from leprosy. Mary Cornwall-Legh found some 700 victims of the disease living in poverty and wretchedness in Kusatsu's Lower Village. It was a place of abject horror for which she could find but one name: the Valley of Gehenna. Yet that valley became for several hundred men, women, and children in subsequent years a Valley of Prayer. The cluster



of homes she built cared for upwards of 50 women, 90 men, and 20 children, at one time, together with 33 healthy children of leprosy patients. The Christian community centering around St. Barnabas embraced 600 souls won to the Christian faith by Miss Cornwall-Legh's life of service.

St. Barnabas mission came to an end as a private institution in 1940—partly because of the retirement of Mary Cornwall-Legh, partly because of the completion of the large government leprosarium, Kuriu Rakusei En, nearby. Patients and a number of the St. Barnabas buildings were transferred to Rakusei En. With them also went St. Ishu's chapel.

St. Ishu's still exists as the center of Christian life at Rakusei, under the leadership of the Rev. M. S. Matsumura who wrote recently: "The Episcopal Church is increasing its number of Christians and we are hoping there shall soon be over a hundred new converts. All Christians are doing their utmost to abide by the Christian doctrine. They often bring their non-Christian friends along to church, hoping the latter will someday become Christian."

## THE ERICKSONS and OSHIMA



Dr. S. M. Erickson

For those who have read "Souls Undaunted" and "Hearts Aglow," two volumes of gem-like Christian verse penned by the blind poet, Honami Nagata, and his friends on a tiny island paradise in Japan's Inland Sea, Oshima is a magic word. That the island and its little band of Christians is known to America is due mainly to the devoted service there of the Presbyterian

## SO SHALL I SING

missionaries, Dr. S. M. and Lois Johnson Erickson. From their missionary posts in nearby Takamatsu, the missionaries went to Oshima—Dr. Erickson to provide a spiritual ministry for the island's 500 and more leprosy patients; Mrs. Erickson to translate for American readers, in poignant verse, the thoughts and feelings of Oshima's lonely exiles.

The Ericksons left Oshima in 1939, destined never to return. Dr. Erickson died in America; and Honami Nagata, too, on the island that had been his home since early youth, passed on to his reward.

But on a knoll overlooking the sea still stands a building signaling the bond of friendship which the Ericksons represented: a Christian chapel, the gift in 1934, through the American Mission to Lepers, to Oshima's Christians from the Christians in America.

### DR. ALBERT OLTMANS



Dr. Albert Oltmans

Perhaps the most influential figure for more than a half century in the development of leprosy missions in Japan, this Holland-born American Reformed Church missionary went to Japan in 1886. Shortly afterward, while a member of the Theological Seminary staff in Tokyo, he became associated with the Christian Committee for Leprosy Work—better known as the Kozensha—organized in 1894, and took an active part in the administration of the newly founded Ithaien Leprosy Home in Tokyo.

In 1925, upon his retirement from active missionary service, he was invited by the American Mission to Lepers to become its

secretary for Japan—and from then until his death in 1939 he gave his full time to the cause of leprosy prevention and control.

While maintaining particular interest in the patients of the Ihaie Home, he kept in close touch with all the Christian leprosy groups in Japan, both in government and private institutions. Interested in their spiritual welfare he led in religious services for them, administered sacraments, sought out church relationships for them.

He helped shape the nature of the government hospitals. He encouraged hospital administrations in their emphasis on the physical treatment of the disease, but convinced them that as well as medical care patients needed mental stimulus, moral guidance, and spiritual food. Christians and non-Christians alike knew and loved and respected him. Largely as the result of the influence he wielded, Christian workers came to have the same access and opportunities as were accorded Buddhists and Shintoists. Alive to his opportunities, he left no stone unturned, no advantage unexploited, to bring Christian teaching into the government hospitals.

At the time of his death, the number of Christians among hospitalized leprosy patients numbered 2,000, about one third of the total number cared for by religious and government funds.

## KAISHUN BYOIN-KUMAMOTO

One of the first in Japan, this leprosy home of the "Resurrection of Hope" was founded by Miss Hannah Riddell in 1894. Its ministry to the 80 or more patients was personal and deeply Christian, characterized by an all-pervading spirit of love and hope and compassion. For many years Kaishun extended a healing and spiritual ministry to leprosy patients also at Kagoshima and in the Liu Kiu Islands (Okinawa).

### Hands Across the Sea

When American missionaries returned to Japan in 1946, they found members of the Kozensha pathetically eager to learn that they could still claim friends among the American churches and fellowship in the American Mission to Lepers. The past three years of post-war dislocation in Japan's economic and political life have presented a number of opportunities for giving practical, assuring evidence of that friendship and fellowship so eagerly sought and gratefully received.

### TWO CHRISTMASSES

One of the historic aspects of the Kozensha's ministry through the years has been to bring a measure of cheer at Christmastime to the patients of Japan's private and government leprosy hospitals. However, the poverty of the Kozensha and its members since the war has curtailed drastically this Christmas program. The birthday of our Lord, for those with leprosy in a land without coal or sufficient food and medical supplies was a day no different from the other cold, cheerless, pain-filled days.

In 1947, for the first time since the curtain of war fell between Japan and our own country, it was possible, through the cooperation

Christmas packages arrive at KURIU RAKUSEI  
EN, Kusatsu.



of Church World Service, to send Christmas boxes to Japan's leprosy patients. One thousand boxes of life-sustaining supplies were dispatched from American shores. For each of the 1000 Christians that could be reached by the Kozensha that year there was a box containing warm flannel for new garments, powdered milk and food concentrates, soap, towels

and small toilet articles, and a small precious hoard of sweets.

#### A LITTLE GIRL'S THANK YOU

*"I put the first piece of candy into my mouth; it felt very cool, for it was peppermint. Then I put a second piece of candy into my mouth and my tongue turned red.*

*As we children ate the candy together, we showed our tongues to one another and one said 'My tongue is red' and another said, 'Mine is blue.'*

*Thank you very much for such novel candy."*

Hatsuo Murakami

The joy of the inmates as they received this first post-war message of brotherhood in Christ from America knew no bounds. Children danced with joy. Old and

young, lame, blind, and crippled they thronged to their churches for thanksgiving services. Christians shared with their non-Christian friends the simple gifts that were a symbol of that greatest gift of all from God to Man.

America's gift in 1948 reflected somewhat improved economic conditions in the hospitals and the country at large. Asked to state their choice, sugar-starved patients asked, through the Kozensha, for candy as a Christmas treat and received the gift of their preference: 1600 pounds of hard candies—a pound for every Christian church member and some to spare and share in the joy of Christmas giving.

## CHAPELS FOR JAPAN

Of the ten Christian congregations in Japan's government hospitals, only five have





Patients at ZENSEI BYOIN, government leprosy hospital near Tokyo.

church buildings of their own in which to center their spiritual life and activities. The others must share a place of worship with Shintoists or Buddhists or must use makeshift quarters in recreation or dining halls.

Most desperate is the need of the 223 Zensei Christians in the government hospital near Tokyo where patients of the former Ihaien Christian Home were transferred in 1942. When the Kozensha's secretary, Mr. K. Fujiwara recently announced at a church service there the hopes and plans for a chapel to be given by the American Mission to Lepers, the congregation, he reports, broke into spontaneous applause and then into equally spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving.

For the building of the Zensei chapel friends in America have given, through the American Mission to Lepers, gifts totalling \$3,500.

A competent, sympathetic architect has drawn plans for a simple, worshipful edifice similar to the chapel Zensei Christians knew and loved at their former Ihaien Home. That chapel, also a gift from America in 1930, was destroyed by fire during the never-to-be-forgotten bombing of Tokyo in May, 1945. Only the organ and the church bell—now carefully preserved for the new chapel—were saved.

The second of the five chapels which the American Mission to Lepers will provide for the Christian churches in Japan's leprosy

colonies is that requested by the superintendent of the 1200-patient Aisei En government leprosy hospital at Nagashima: Dr. Kensuke Mitsuda. Near retirement age and in frail health, Dr. Mitsuda wishes to see a chapel in his institution before he dies, he told Mr. Fujiwara of the Kozensha recently. This earnest request is unusual in having come from a man who by his own admission was at one time unwilling to help his warm personal friend, Dr. Albert Oltmans, secure permission for a chapel in his colony—because he believed it not fitting for a government hospital to contain a Christian building.

Built of timber from the hospital grounds, the Aisei En chapel will cost an estimated \$1,800 and will serve as a house of worship to a family of 100 Christians.

## OF THE FUTURE

It is not likely that American Christians will be called upon—as they still are in many parts of the world—to provide in Japan a physical and medical ministry for sufferers of leprosy. Christian initiative launched the anti-leprosy movement in Japan and the selfless devotion of Christian missionaries gave it leadership and inspiration for many years; but developments in that country over the past half century have been toward a larger and larger degree of state responsibility for the physical care of leprosy victims and a steady increase and improvement of hospital and clinical facilities.

However, it still devolves upon American Christians to help the forces of Christianity in Japan provide a ministry which none but the followers of the Faith can provide: a vital ministry of Christ's love and spiritual healing.



Honami Nagata

My Lord in me has found a dwelling place,  
And I in Him, Oh, glorious boon to gain  
To be His temple! Gladly will I face,  
In His great strength, all bitterness and pain!

Honami Nagata  
From  
*Hearts Aglow*

Tr. by  
Lois Johnson  
Erickson



Lois Johnson Erickson

AMERICAN MISSION TO LEPERS  
INCORPORATED

156 Fifth Ave., Suite 1134, New York 10, N. Y.

*Branch Offices:*

156 Fifth Ave., Suite 520, New York 10, N. Y.

326 W. Third Street, Los Angeles 13, Calif.

77 W. Washington Street, Chicago 2, Ill.

14 Beacon Street, Boston 8, Mass.

509 Burt Bldg., Dallas 1, Texas